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Upton Sinclair And His Book, THE JUNGLE

When we were young and working for the livestock slaughtering and meat packing industry, our department chief once made mention of an Upton Sinclair, an author, and his book, *The Jungle* (Doubleday, Page & Company, New York, 1906). We have forgotten just what the department chief said. We vaguely remember that he indicated that the book was biassed and that Sinclair had misrepresented working conditions in the meat packing industry in order to develop a skillful, but invalid, argument in favor of socialism.

It was said that Sinclair had lived in the meat slaughtering territory in Chicago for a period of time to gather information

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for *The Jungle.* The residential territory around the Chicago stock yards and packing plants has a general name, to wit, "back of the yards." This is a modest residential area, occupied in succession by waves of immigrants from various European countries who had enough to get boat passage to this country, but who were beginning anew "from scratch" in this country, their new home. Obviously, such people would not and could not get or afford the best housing when they first arrived.

Sinclair's book might be expected to have the shortcomings of any book based on the observations of a short-term visitor, just as the book of an American who might make a hurried trip to Europe and then comes back and puts out a book on European conditions; such a book is not likely to be authentic. Sinclair, having a "sociological" and political purpose in writing the book, would because of that be subjected to a further failing, namely, to the temptation of being biassed in his selection of evidence in order "to make a case."

We left the slaughtering industry and for years heard little of Sinclair's *The Jungle.* Two years ago we attended a conference of *laissez-faire* liberals at Buck Hill Falls Inn in the Pocono Mountains in Pennsylvania, and a young man attending the conference there indicated that in a course in sociology which he had taken at college *The Jungle* had been required reading. We were surprised to learn that he considered the description of the packing industry in *The Jungle* to be true. We had not read the book ourselves, but the young man's acceptance of it and his general belief in it clashed with the impression we had received from our former employer. We learned from the young man that *The Jungle* is still a widely-read book in courses in sociology in some colleges.

Our young friend declared that Sinclair made out a case against capitalism in this sense: that the employes in the meat packing companies were ground down mercilessly by exploitation, and that the employers lived in conscienceless luxury and idleness. Now that conflicted with our own experience and observation in the meat packing industry. We made an indefinite resolution to describe the "economics" of the meat packing industry sometime, and this issue of PROGRESSIVE CALVINISM is for that purpose. fn

The Story In THE JUNGLE

The main characters in the book are a Lithuanian immigrant named Jurgis Rudkus and his near relatives, who immigrated to this country presumably in 1901 or 1902.

The book begins with a story of the wedding in Packingtown of Rudkus and his sweetheart who had also come to this country. It was a wild and expensive wedding in the tradition of native Lithuania, set off against a background of poverty, anxiety, ignorance and impending disaster.

Then the book "backtracks" and gives the prior history of the various characters — their early life in Lithuania, their immigration difficulties, their hard life in Packingtown.

The main thread in the story is as follows:

1. In Lithuania life had been in some respects hard, but nevertheless wonderful. Healthful, wholesome.

2. Information about the United States had deceived them into coming here. A previous immigrant (who was, however, practically bankrupt in this country) had persuaded them by letters that this was a country in which to get rich.

3. They were cheated, however, by everybody in this country. Consequently, they lived in terrible poverty, and the working conditions in the packinghouses were brutalizing, hope-destroying, and disillusioning.

4. Overwork, bad health and unsanitary conditions, exploitation, unwholesome food, accidents and graft by others kept grinding them down.

5. A foreman in the plant rapes Rudkus's wife, and later she stays out several nights at a house of prostitution, which her forelady at the packinghouse managed. Rudkus beats up the foreman. Justice completely miscarries; the foreman, supported by his company, is exonerated; the wronged husband lands in jail. The family is dispossessed and ejected from its home.

6. The great downward tailspin continues. Rudkus's wife (who was expectant at the time she was first raped by the

foreman and then spent several nights in a house of prostitution) dies in her second and premature confinement. One of the children of Rudkus's widowed mother-in-law dies and the others are demoralized. Finally, Rudkus's only child (son) at the age of two years drowns in the mud in the street in front of the boarding house. Rudkus abandons those who are left.

7. He becomes a tramp, a hobo. He gets away from the terrible factory conditions of great cities. He begs, steals, works, drinks, spends his money on strange women. Then he returns to Chicago for the next winter, but he avoids the survivors in his family. He is again in an accident. Hospitalized. Destitute. One night in the slums he is picked up by the tipsy eighteen-year-old son of a big packer. The young drunk takes Rudkus to the family mansion. He gives Rudkus a $100 bill which unfortunately again gets him into jail.

8. Then Rudkus gets into politics and becomes influential in electing an alderman for the packinghouse ward. Next he gets an opportunity to return to the packinghouse as a spy of the packers against the unions. He gets big pay, and while a strikebreaker be becomes a foreman. At an unfortunate time when walking down a corridor at night in the packing plant (strangely, with a woman in a kimono whom he has just met) he suddenly meets the foreman who had raped his wife. He again "beats up" the foreman. Mercilessly the wheels of injustice again bear down on him, and he is destitute and hunted.

9. In his jail terms he becomes acquainted with a thief and footpad. They engage in some robberies together. Rudkus learns to know easy money as well as he has known poverty. But misfortune dogs his steps.

10. Begging one night, he recognizes a young woman as one of the acquaintances of his family. She seems prosperous. She gives him the address of the principal young woman left in his own family. This turns out to be the address of a house of prostitution, of which she has become an inmate. Necessity to help support the family is alleged to be the cause of this prostitution. It is accepted as unavoidable and consequently proper.

11. Then all the foregoing reaches its climax. Everything thus far experienced leads to the great intellectual and moral rebirth of Rudkus — to socialism. He becomes a "comrade." The last chapters of the book are devoted to the arguments in favor of socialism.

All the agony in the history of the Rudkus group is because of the "system" in which they find themselves, namely, capitalism. All the hope for the future is in one thing only — socialism. In short, everything in the book is presented to make all the evils in the world appear to be because of capitalism and all of the hope of the world to lie only in the complete abandonment of capitalism, and the adoption of socialism.

Such is the plot of the novel. We have left out the ghastly details. fn

The Socialist Case Against The Packing Industry

After Jurgis Rudkus had been reborn — that is, after he had been dramatically converted to socialism — he sat up late at night with a Polish immigrant, a socialist, who "explained" the alleged real situation in the meat industry to Rudkus. The Pole's name was Ostrinski. This is the enlightenment that Ostrinski provided to Rudkus:

1. The meat packers were a *beef trust,* a gigantic combination of capital, which

   a. crushed all opposition
   b. violated the laws of the land
   c. preyed on the people
   d. employed corruption in all its methods
   e. bribed city officials
   f. secretly stole municipal water
   g. dominated courts against strikers
   h. forbade the mayor to enforce building ordinances
   i. prevented inspection of meat
   j. falsified government reports

k. disobeyed rebate laws
l. burned incriminating evidence
m. protected its "criminal agents" by sending them out of the country
n. "forced" cattle prices so low that it destroyed the livestock-growing industry
o. ruined retail butchers
p. arbitrarily fixed the price of meat
q. monopolized refrigerator cars
r. controlled the leather and grain business of the country
s. levied "an enormous tribute" upon all poultry, eggs, fruit and vegetables
t. was reaching out to control railroads, trolley lines, and gas and electric companies.

2. The meat packers operated cruelly and savagely, valuing an employe no more than a hog which they slaughtered. They had no concern whatever about the farmer, the consumer of meat, the retailer, the employe. Ostrinski informs Rudkus that "it was literally the fact that in the methods of the packers a hundred human lives did not balance a penny of profit."

Those "truths" as outlined by Sinclair enlightened Rudkus's mind as "an almost superhuman experience" or revelation. A sober reader will, however, realize that some of these charges are outrageous, for example, that packers would value a penny as worth more than a hundred human lives. A source of information which makes exaggerated statements of that sort, will be accounted by all sensible people as being generally unreliable.

3. The meat packing industry was the "incarnation of blind and insensate Greed. . . . a monster devouring with a thousand mouths, trampling with a thousand hoofs; . . . the Great Butcher . . . the spirit of Capitalism made flesh. . . . a pirate ship . . . [warring] upon civilization." (Pages 376-378.)

But the foregoing "description" of the economics of the meat packing industry was not for it alone. What was "true" in the meat industry was also true for all other industries. Sinclair writes:

1. That prosperity could be unlimited — consider all the land, building, railroads, mines, factories and stores;

2. That the multitude are ground down for the benefit of the few so that they can live in "unthinkable luxury";

3. That injustice generally prevailed because some "owned" the capital;

4. That if the owners would get less (or nothing) everybody else would have more;

5. That government could manage as economically as private citizens;

6. That the people who opposed socialism were fools, who called themselves "individualists";

7. That these "individualists" had been so stunted by capitalism that they no longer knew what freedom was." (Pages 387-388.)

Greed is spelled in the foregoing summary with a capital *G*. Greed is one of the words with a bad meaning. It may mean a very strong desire; but that desire may be moral or it may be immoral. For Sinclair and all socialists "Greed" covers *any* and *every* wish to get a "return" on your possessions, any rent on a house you own, any interest on a sum of money you loan out, any dividends on stock you buy, any profit in a business you operate. All such income is in response to Greed. Greed is immoral. It is exploitation. It is "a system"; the system is in itself bad. It is not merely that bad men abuse the system; even good men could and should not apply the system. It is only socialism which can save mankind. Socialism attacks the capitalist "system" in its roots. It permits no private property, and no income from private property — no rent, no interest, no dividends, no profits. It is the system of Greed — capitalism — which has corrupted men. When mankind abandons and destroys that capitalist system, then under socialism (communism) the Kingdom of Heaven will have descended on earth.

Such is the theme of Sinclair's book, *The Jungle*. It is the religion of socialism.

Sinclair is no philosopher; he does not argue "dialectical materialism" philosophically; he writes a novel in the field of action; he is a "practical" man. He wishes to destroy all return on capital; *that* is *practical* socialism. When a Lester De Koster writes a book, *All Ye That Labor,* in which he has no logical argument in

defense of the scriptural ownership of property and in favor of unearned income from property over against the Marxian theory in favor of socialism (which denies the morality of *any* return on property), then the problem of the intellectuals in the Christian Reformed church becomes painfully apparent. How can and do they *rationally* defend a return on capital, against the socialist argument that there should be none? fn

The Inevitability Of Socialism; An Impossibility

Krushchev, present top man in Russia, was recently given television time over the Columbia Broadcasting System. Many people apparently listened to him. We think poorly of the judgment of the Columbia Broadcasting System to have put Krushchev on.

The remark by Krushchev which seems to have impressed his listeners more than anything else is this: the *grandchildren* of present-day citizens of the United States *will all be socialists.*

This is an old Socialist allegation, repeated over and over in the expectation that people will finally believe it. The allegation stems from Marx, who decreed that at the same time that the statement was to be repeated and repeated, no one was to declare exactly what Socialism would be like. The prophecy was that Socialism was inevitable but its exact outline was unforeseeable and unpredictable.

Universal socialism is impossible. *Local* socialism as in Russia and Iron Curtain countries is possible. Why is local socialism possible but universal socialism impossible?

Universal socialism is not possible because *planning* is not possible under universal socialism. One kind of *planning, centralized planning without the help of market prices,* is exactly what Socialism is supposed to be. Nevertheless, if there are no *market prices* anywhere, then all planning is impossible.

Russia can still do some centralized planning. How? Only because it can get clues from market prices outside of the Russian

orbit, from abroad. But if *all* market prices disappear under universal socialism, will planning of any kind be possible? None whatever. The alternate for Capitalism is not universal socialism; the alternate for the universal abandonment of Capitalism is universal chaos. Only limited barter will be possible if there are no market prices.

Market prices are not the prices set by the Socialist idea about *value,* as if value were an objective something in an object, injected into it by a measurable amount of labor. *Value* is a *subjective* phenomena; it cannot be objective. *Value* is what the buyers — the market — will willingly pay for goods. Where the consumer is not sovereign, where markets do not exist as expressed in some common monetary unit, planning cannot exist of any kind except for a primitive, self-contained small community with exchange limited to barter.

It is then possible that the grandchildren of present day Americans will all be socialists, but it is not possible that the whole world will be socialist at the same time. Our grandchildren can all be socialists only if somewhere else in the world somebody else's grandchildren are not socialists and have a *free market* economy. By calculating on the basis of a free foreign market our grandchildren will still be able to be socialists.

The amusing thing about Krushchev's and the other socialist-communists is that they expect to have *universal* socialism-communism. It is exactly that universality of socialism which is impossible.

Sinclair in *The Jungle* repeated the same old Marxian wares about the inevitability of Socialism. He writes:

> The inevitability of the revolution [to establish socialism] depended upon this fact, that they had no choice but to unite or be exterminated; this fact, grim and inexorable, depended upon no human will, it was the law of the economic process, . . . (Page 390.)

The theory of Marx and his followers is that society will get poorer and poorer as capitalism develops. In order for men to survive there must be a revolution introducing socialism — otherwise all employes will be exterminated. The premise on which this

is based — that the employes will get poorer and poorer — has been proved, by history, to be false. Poor Marx was a wretched prophet.

The argument that *universal* socialism is impossible because no economic calculation (planning, relating costs to proceeds) is possible when no free markets exist anywhere was first developed by Ludwig von Mises in his famous book on *Socialism,* (Yale University Press, 1951). The argument by Von Mises has never been answered, and it cannot be answered. We refer readers to the book. See also Von Mises's *Human Action,* Yale University Press, 1949, Chapter XXVI, "The Impossibility of Economic Calculation Under Socialism."

We quote briefly from what Von Mises has written in his essay "Trends Can Change" in *The Freeman,* under date of February 12, 1951.

> The Marxian dogma of the inevitability of socialism was based on the thesis that capitalism necessarily results in progressive impoverishment of the immense majority of people. All the advantages of technological progress benefit exclusively the small minority of exploiters. The masses are condemned to increasing "misery, oppression, slavery, degradation, exploitation." No action on the part of governments or labor unions can succeed in stopping this evolution. Only socialism, which is bound to come "with the inexorability of a law of nature," will bring salvation by "the expropriation of the few usurpers by the mass of people."
>
> Facts have belied this prognosis no less than all other Marxian forecasts. In the capitalist countries the common man's standard of living is today incomparably higher than it was in the days of Marx. It is simply not true that the fruits of technological improvement are enjoyed exclusively by the capitalists while the laborer, as the Communist Manifesto says, "instead of rising with the progress of industry, sinks deeper and deeper." Not a minority of "rugged individualists," but the masses, are the main consumers of the products turned out by large-scale produc-

tion. Only morons can still cling to the fable that capitalism "is incompetent to assure an existence to its slave within this slavery."

Stop worrying. Our grandchildren will all be socialists *only if elsewhere in the world there are free markets — capitalism.* If the grandchildren of everybody become socialists, then there will be no organized society; everything will be chaos. fn

The Reliability Of Sinclair As A Witness

Capitalism has some grievous faults. There are the faults of the *theory* of capitalism. There are also the faults of the *practice* of capitalism, when it departs from the theory even where the theory is correct.

(PROGRESSIVE CALVINISM does not agree with all aspects of the prevailing *theory* of capitalism, and it knows that actual conduct does not, in this sinful world, conform to theory when theory may be right.)

But capitalism can also be misrepresented and caricatured and burlesqued. Sinclair, unfortunately, does that in *The Jungle.* We give four cases: (1) young Stanislovas who went to work before he was 16 on a falsified statement of his age and who was a couple of years later devoured by rats; (2) the drowning of two-year-old Antanas in the street; (3) the subway railroad built under the loop in Chicago under the pretense of making telephone tunnels; (4) the sale of an 18-year-old house under the pretense that it was new.

1. *The Rats Devoured Stanislovas.* Marija reports the events to Rudkus:

> [Stanislovas] was working in an oil factory — at least he was hired by the men to get their beer. He used to carry cans on a long pole; and he'd drink a little out of each can, and one day he drank too much, and fell asleep in a corner, and got locked up in the place all night. When they found him the rats had killed him and eaten him nearly all up. (Page 346.)

It is very melodramatic. There are a lot of big rats in the packing house hide cellars and some other places, but Sinclair is stretching a point here.

2. *The Drowning Of Two-Year-Old Antanas.* Rudkus's son, Antanas, is reported to have drowned in a street two miles south or west of the stockyards in Chicago.

Rudkus comes home from work for the weekend. Women are sitting in the kitchen.

> A dead silence had fallen in the room, and he saw that every one was staring at him. "What's the matter?" he exclaimed again.
>
> And then, up in the garret, he heard sounds of wailing, in Marija's voice. He started for the ladder — and Aniele seized him by the arm. "No, no!" she exclaimed. "Don't go up there!"
>
> "What is it?" he shouted.
>
> And the old woman answered him weakly: "It's Antanas. He's dead. He drowned out in the street!" (Page 251.)

On what street south or west of the stockyards could anyone drown?

3. *Tunnels for telephones.* Rudkus gets a job to help build a tunnel for telephones under the downtown loop area in Chicago. Sinclair writes that the city council had passed a bill allowing a company:

> . . . to construct telephone conduits under the city streets; and upon the strength of this, a great corporation had proceeded to tunnel all Chicago with a system of railway freight subways. In the city there was a combination of employers, representing hundreds of millions of capital, and formed for the purpose of crushing the labor unions. The chief union which troubled it was the teamsters'; and when these freight tunnels were completed, connecting all the big factories and stores with the railroad depots, they would have the teamsters' union by the throat. (Page 267.)

Fantastic. Who, possessing judgment, would believe it.

4. *Sale of old houses for new.* Almost immediately on the arrival of the Rudkus family in Chicago they bought a *new* house. The whole story is a melodrama of alleged dishonesty of real estate men and lawyers. An old crone later tells the Rudkuses the alleged facts:

> . . . In the first place as to the house they had bought, it was not new at all, . . . ; it was about fifteen years old, and there was nothing new on it but the paint, which was so bad that it needed to be put on new every year or two . . . (Page 77.)
>
> * * *
>
> Why, since it had been built, no less than four families that their informant could name had tried to buy it and failed [had been dispossessed]. (Page 78.)

Who would believe that a house fifteen years old was a new house and would buy it as such? Three years later Rudkus is himself dispossessed, according to the story. Sinclair declares that the sixth buyer of this house, now eighteen years old, considered it to be new. Rudkus, returning from a jail term, and not knowing of the dispossession, approaches his house. A new family occupies it.

> The woman stared at him in frightened wonder, she must have thought she was dealing with a maniac—Jurgis [Rudkus] looked like one. "Your home!" she echoed.
>
> "My home!" he half shrieked. "I lived here, I tell you."
>
> "You must be mistaken," she answered him. "No one ever lived here. This is a new house. They told us so. They — " (Page 210.)

It is with improbabilities as listed — that people do not know an eighteen-year-old building from a new one — that Sinclair makes a case against capitalism and prejudices "the system." fn

Who Is My Neighbor?

A STUDY OF THE MORALITY OF THE ECONOMICS OF THE MEAT PACKING INDUSTRY

The Problem

"Who is my neighbor?"

The scribe in Christ's day asked that question. What his motive was, we have often wondered. Was he honestly inquiring? Was he asking defensively? Was he sarcastic? Was he endeavoring to run Christ into a trap? We do not know, and maybe it is not important.

But whatever his purpose the scribe got an answer — in the famous parable of the Good Samaritan.

The idea in the parable is that *everybody* is a neighbor, and everybody must be treated as a neighbor, with love to the neighbor scripturally defined (that is, differently from that of the social gospel or of communism).

Parables have their limitations and that is true also of the parable of the Good Samaritan. It tells two things: (1) *everybody* is a neighbor; and (2) to those who are in emergency — distress, spontaneous help should be shown (charity).

Granted that business must treat everybody as a neighbor, it is impossible to run business as a *regular* charity institution. We have covered that subject previously (in the January 1957 issue, pages 5 to 11).

We come then to the moral problem raised by Upton Sinclair in *The Jungle* — what should have been the attitude of the meat packing industry to Jurgis Rudkus and the various members of his family? Rudkus, be it remembered, was an ignorant and poor Lithuanian immigrant. Be it remembered also, that at that time the packing industry was making large profits. On the one hand riches, luxury and alleged leisure; on the other hand poverty, misery and hard and unpleasant labor.

There are potentially four things at issue:

1. Abnormally large profits for business;

2. Modest or normal profits for business;
3. No profits whatever;
4. Perfect equality in all income.

Sinclair favors number 3; he rejects number 4, declaring wages should vary with the unpleasantness of the work.

In *The Jungle,* as a literary device, Sinclair places extreme poverty and need of Rudkus over against abnormally large profits of the packers. He does that by having (1) Rudkus as a beggar in distress meet (2) tipsy eighteen-year-old Freddy Jones (the young son of Jones, the rich meat packer) who is living in idleness and dissipation, while the older Jones is away in Europe.

It is not to be disputed that the meat packers — their real names were Armour, Swift, Cudahy, Morris and others — were at the time (the years 1900-1905) making large profits.

Were those large profits morally defensible? Was the "system" (capitalism) which permitted those large profits a morally defensible system, even when the poverty and misery of certain employes of those meat packers was distressing? Those are the questions to which an answer is given in what follows.

As beside the point, we are not considering modest or ordinary business profits. Nor are we considering sins and crimes in specific cases against the law of God — violence, deception, fraud, theft, adultery — as being part of this problem. We are only considering the "system" of capitalism which on occasion results in very large profits while poverty and misery pathetically exist by its very side.

Who Are The Individuals Involved?

Sinclair points up the issue as we have already mentioned by contrasting a miserable employe, a Rudkus, with a spoiled, irresponsible, drunken son of an immensely wealthy meat packer, called Jones. It looks like the Rudkuses *versus* the Joneses.

But that oversimplifies the problem. The idea is that the Rudkuses are getting too little and the Joneses too much. But there are others involved. Altogether there are the following:

1. The Rudkuses, the *employes* of the meat packing companies;

2. The Joneses, the *owners* of the meat packing companies;

3. The *farmers* and other suppliers of the raw materials of the meat packing companies;

4. The *retailers* of meat who sell it to the final consumers; and

5. The ultimate *consumer* of the meat.

Jones, the packer-owner, in a given circumstance, might appear to be getting too much, but that might be happening at the expense of the farmer, or of the retailer, or of the consumer, and not at the expense of the Rudkuses, employed in the plants. Certainly, it cannot be correct to contrast only the packer and his employe. That is a partial viewpoint, and not a birdseye viewpoint. It does not see the *whole* problem involving the five groups who are all involved. The question is this: How is each of the five to get his *proper share?* How keep the consumer from being unfair to the farmer; or the farmer from being unfair to the consumer? Or the retailer from being unfair to the consumer or the packer? And how keep the employe of the packer from being unfair to the rest?

There is, in the final analysis, the following situation. What does the consumer wish to make available to pay for meat in comparison with his other needs? In other words, how much is he willing to pay to the retailer for meat? The answer to that is what is usually called the consumers' *meat dollar.* That meat dollar must be divided between (1) the retailer; he must get something for his services; (2) the packer; he must get something too; (3) the packinghouse employe; he, too, must live; and (4) the farmer and other suppliers (of boxes, freight, etc.) also must find it worthwhile or they will not produce livestock any more for slaughter, nor other necessary supplies.

A little reflection will show that Sinclair does not pose the problem so that it can be seen in perspective; he contrasts only the

packers and their employes. What has not been stated correctly as a problem has small chance of being solved correctly.

Coercion Versus Noncoercion

The answers to the problems as posed can in general character be only one of either of two kinds: (1) the division between the five groups will be made *without coercion*; or (2) the division will be made *with coercion*. Either these five groups will all act *freely*, or some one or more of the groups will get more than their share *by coercion*, at the expense of one or more of the others.

Here are two examples of coercion.

The packers may organize a "trust," a mutual agreement, to hold down the price of livestock, to raise the price to retailers, or to hold down the laborers' pay. That is a monopoly. It is coercion. It is evil. It destroys competition. There is nothing sacred about competition, except that its effect is to limit and destroy monopoly, that is, coercion.

Another example of coercion is a union with a closed shop contract. It strikes. It prevents any slaughtering, processing or distributing of meat until it gets the pay it demands. It gets it. The extra that the employes get by coercion comes out of the packers, the consumers, the retailers, the farmers. Somebody else *must* foot the bill.

Trusts (business monopolies) and closed shops (labor monopolies) are merely two different forms of coercion.

What we have outlined that the packers can do, or the employes, can also be done by the action of farmers or retailers. They too can organize monopolistically and consequently coercively. (However, for a technical reason it is less easy for them to do so.)

In Progressive Calvinism we happen to be convinced that a society based on coercion is contrary to the commandments of God. (Also that it is harmful and impoverishing for society as a whole.) We believe that the problems, in this case, between consumer, retailer, packer, employe and farmer should be settled *without coercion* between them. (Coercion is forbidden in the Sixth Commandment in the Mosaic decalogue: to wit, Thou shalt not kill (coerce, engage in violence).)

The rule of coercion should be universal or the rule of noncoercion should be universal. Everybody should be permitted to exercise coercion, or nobody should. What is sauce for the goose, should be sauce for the gander. Scripture teaches noncoercion. Moses, after he died, was described as the meekest man of his generation. He denied the right of coercion (except to prevent evil). Christ, in his day, similarly taught meekness and noncoercion. Some businessmen, some unions (including some so-called Christian), some theologians (especially social gospel theologians—those who teach *agape*), and all interventionists, socialists and communists teach coercion. Some of them even declare that coercion is the essence of Christianity. Their reasoning is a case of an end justifying a means; coercion is to be permitted in order to promote their unscriptural idea of *agape* (love).

Coercion By Men Versus Coercion By Circumstances

We have been referring to coercion by men, not coercion by circumstances.

There is a universal *welfareshortage*. (See PROGRESSIVE CALVINISM, July 1956, pp. 209-219.) Moses taught it in Genesis. The New Testament takes it for granted and teaches it in its own way. Every person of maturity, judgment and self-knowledge knows that in this finite world there is a universal welfareshortage. That welfareshortage "coerces" us all. It make us choose between limited satisfactions and disutilities. If we select one thing, we must forego another. Buy your wife a fur coat and something else must come out of your family budget.

Whether there is a necessary and unavoidable welfareshortage may be disputed. The socialists, for one, dispute it. Sinclair in *The Jungle* indicates that *with one hour's work a day* we can live as in paradise, provided we have a socialist economic structure for society. This is not the place to argue the point. If the socialists are right about it, then Moses was stupidly wrong.

In this analysis, which is limited to a specific problem, we cannot digress further on the question of the welfareshortage, and the universal coercion of men by it. Our question is: If there is no coercion between the consumer of meat, the retailer, the meat

packer, the employe of the meat packer, and the farmer, how much then should and will each one get? — what will be the free (uncoerced by people) retail price of meat? (2) the wholesale price? (3) the profit of the packer? (4) the wage of his employe? and (5) the price of livestock for the farmer?

The Economics Of Meat Packing

Sinclair in his *The Jungle* indicates that the meat packers were getting too much of the consumers' meat dollar. The packers are alleged to have been lolling in luxury. Maybe the farmer too was prosperous, and the consumer, and the retailer, but the employes, the Rudkuses, were not doing well at all. Therefore, apparently this is Sinclair's reasoning, the alleged excess to the packers was coming out of the flesh and blood of their employes.

What had been happening to create these large profits? Further, how long were they to last?

Let us answer the last question first. The large profits were rapidly coming to an end. It was, in fact, almost the end of an era — an era of the epoch-making contribution of the meat packing industry to the welfare of society. But with the end of the special contribution it was inevitable that there would be an end to the extraordinary profits. Today meat packing is one of the least profitable industries in America. It is a stale industry. Gone is its glamour. Who is shouting now about meat packing profits? Profits are so low that the stock market quotations on the stocks of some the largest packers are modest fractions of what the books show has been invested in the companies. We lack space for the statistics. We refer readers to the published financial statements of the largest packers. Whoever knows how to analyze financial reports will realize that the meat packing industry is no bonanza at the present time.

But why the large profits around the turn of the century, around 1900?

A gigantic technical revolution had taken place in the meat business. This resulted from new methods of refrigeration and especially from the shipping of dressed meat in refrigerated cars, which were a novelty.

The previous situation had been: (1) livestock was produced in surplus in the great middle west farm area; (2) the animals were shipped alive to the eastern seaboard; (3) eastern local butcher-retailers bought them, slaughtered, processed and sold the meat. What were the economics — the costs — of this process?

It was expensive to ship *live* animals long distances. The local butcher-retailers in the East had "high costs" because there could be little division of labor in their operations and no real mass production methods. *In short, costs were high.* Who paid for it? Two groups: (1) the consumer in the form of high priced meat; and (2) the farmer in the form of receiving low livestock prices.

Then refrigeration, especially the refrigerator car, was developed. What happened? First, live animals did not need to be shipped to the eastern seaboard, shrinking in weight during shipment, requiring feed en route, and a waste of freight (a large part of the weight of the animals being eventual waste materials, by-products not usable by a small slaughter-retailer). Secondly, large numbers of animals could under the new situation be concentrated and killed at one location, permitting extensive division of labor, lower costs generally, and the utilization of all by-products. The net result was that, in meat costs between the consumer and the farmer, there was an enormous reduction in costs. Who would get the benefit of the reduction? The consumer, the retailer, the packer, the employe, the farmer?

The answer is:

1. The consumer and the farmer both gained immediately, modestly at first, but steadily more and more, and permanently.

2. The eastern slaughter-retailer lost ground at once and was injured immediately and permanently.

3. The packinghouse employe was hardly injured or benefited. He was affected only in a very minor way.

4. The big slaughterers and meat packers who developed in Chicago, Kansas City, Omaha and elsewhere, had a *temporary* extraordinarily large profit which was hardly accomplished before it began to shrink gradually and permanently to a modest level.

Why did these big and rich packers come into existence? *Because their costs were lower* they were able to pay more for livestock than eastern slaughter-retailers, thereby helping the farmer; and they were able to sell meat cheaper than the eastern slaughter-retailers, thereby helping the consumer. They did both. If they had not done so, the farmers would have sold their livestock as aforetime, and the consumers would have bought from the small eastern slaughter-retailers as aforetime. The market was *free;* there was *no coercion.* The farmers sold livestock to the highest buyers; the consumers bought meat from the cheapest sellers. The highest livestock buyers and the cheapest meat sellers were the newcomers, the new mass meat packers in Chicago and elsewhere. They got the business. At this juncture the only groups hurt were the eastern slaughter-retailers and the railroads (which received less freight).

To have protected the eastern slaughter-retailers against the farmers, consumers and packers would have been *coercion* to protect a high-cost producer who had become through no fault of his own hurtful to society generally, *under the changed circumstances.*

Let us now consider the small eastern slaughter-retailer as out of the picture, with only four claimants left — the consumer, the farmer, the packer and the packer's employe. The key individual in this group was the packer. *He* was the one who was cutting costs. But he could get no benefit from that, unless he shared some of it with others. He had to raise the price of the livestock or he would not get it, and he had to lower meat prices or his refrigerated meats would not sell against the fresh local kill in the East. He therefore surrendered as much to the consumer and farmer as was absolutely necessary to get the increased volume he wanted (and on which his profit was large because his costs were less.) He hogged as much of the profit as he could.

Was that right?

The answer to that question is that it was unqualifiedly right.

What was needed to develop fully this new low cost method for the meat industry? A huge investment in slaughtering houses,

pickle cellars, smoke houses, refineries, railroad cars, branches, inventories, accounts receivable and in ready cash. Where were the funds to come from to buy land, build plants and operate a huge business?

In a broad way, from only two sources — outside investors or profits generated within the business.

Let us first assume small profits or no profits. Would outside investors then put in any money to expand the meat packing business? They would refuse. A large, experienced investor would say that he would not invest in a low-profit, new, and consequently speculative industry. A small investor would say to himself the same thing; that new meat packing method is not profitable; therefore, it is not safe; it is no place for *my* money.

If, to the contrary, profits were large, then outside investors, both large and small, would be willing investors. But the *condition* just mentioned, must be met, namely, the business must already be making a lot of money. Therefore, in order to be able to expand rapidly, a new industry — an industry which is cutting costs — must absolutely have high profits. It must first generate high profits itself. Those should be (and will be) largely reinvested in the growing business. The high earnings plus the reinvestment of those earnings make outside investors confident. They are then willing to put in some of their own money.

But if there are no large profits, there will not be a large investment. If there is no large investment, the industry will not grow. If it will not grow society will not be able to benefit. The reduction in society's cost of living cannot be accomplished without large new investment, and the large new investment will not be made unless there are large profits.

A word about an argument that a thoughtless person might advance. Why make the huge investment in plants and branches and railroad cars? Why not forget it? Let us keep life simple as Gandhi wanted it! Everybody have his own little compound, his hut, his own loin cloth. The idea may appear romantic and idyllic. But unless there are huge aggregations of capital, the standard of living cannot improve. In the United States the sole reason for a

high standard of living is because there is a large amount of capital *per capita.*

Who "calls the signals" in an industry as described? Those who initiate the reduction in costs. And the ball is in their hands. They are running with it. The rest of the team generally prospers with them, but the investors have the initiative. It should be theirs. They are the ones who are making the changes. They only fully understand them and they only can guide them.

Do they *seize* the power? No, it is given to them. The meat consumers, the producers of the livestock, and the investors all want those who are cutting costs to have what they are getting, because it helps all of them. When they are no longer helped they will — in a noncoercive society — immediately withdraw their assistance and cooperation. In a free market, in a noncoercive society, the only people who become rich (besides those who inherit wealth) are those who produce great services, *in the estimation of their fellows.*

The Poor Worker In An Expanding Industry

But what of the *poor and miserable* laborer in an expanding and highly profitable industry? For example, how about the wretched Jurgis Rudkuses in Sinclair's *The Jungle?* Grant that Sinclair exaggerated the condition in Chicago in the area known as "Back of the Yards"; the fact still remains that the workers were not "well off."

Let us begin with an extreme proposition, namely, *all* the benefit from the reduction in costs by the new methods, *all* of it should have gone to the hard-pressed individual workers in the meat packing industry.

To this proposition the answer is that if all had been attempted to be given or to be seized by the workers, or if any charitably minded person had wished to transfer all the benefit to the workers, then there would have been no cost-cutting, price-reducing meat packing industry, with all its general benefits. That industry just would not have come into existence. There would have been nothing to divide. The goose that could lay the golden eggs was killed before she laid them.

The unions today, under uninformed secular and so-called Christian leadership, often demand that *all* the benefits of mechanization and improvement in technology go to the worker in that industry. The proposition is suicidal and unscriptural. It will not work as just outlined, and it violates the basic idea in the parable of the Good Samaritan, which says that *all* men are our neighbors.

Let us assume that *all* the benefits from the improved technology in the meat packing industry had been paid out *in increased rates of pay to the laborers already employed.* Who would then get no benefits? The farmer would not. The consumer would not. No investor would. Wages would be terrifically high in the meat packing industry. *But nobody else could or would benefit.* The benefits of the new technology would *be for only a limited group of employes. All* men would not be benefited; only the few. This violates the principal that all men are neighbors equally.

What would be the consequences of the alternative non-coercive wage policy, namely, the policy of paying (1) only the going wage plus (2) as much premium as was necessary to draw workers from industries which were paying less. The consequences would be: (1) employes in the lowest paid industries would move into the new industry which was paying more; there would be more employment at the higher wages and less employment at the lower wages; other workers besides those already in the meat packing industry would benefit; (2) in the second place, *everybody* in a special sense, namely *all consumers,* would benefit in the form of the lower prices for meat.

We would have then, by a noncoercive, nonunion employment situation, a much more general, universal distribution of benefits. In contrast, a restrictive, grasping wage policy in specific industries prevents the benefits of progress from being diffused throughout society. A noncoercive policy is in effect brotherly, neighborly, beneficent, diffusing benefits as widely and nondiscriminatingly as sunshine and rain from heaven. A coercive policy is in effect unbrotherly, nonneighborly, harmful, selfishly restricting benefits. As Scripture says, "He that soweth sparingly shall reap also sparingly; and he that soweth bountifully shall reap also bountifully" (II Corinthians 9:6).

The policy just outlined may appear unfeeling and cruel. It is not. Others beside those we see right next to us need help. Our "charity" should extend beyond the man directly beside us. As a perfect example, reason through what happened in Rudkus's case. He lived in Lithuania. His poverty there was worse than "back of the yards." The millions who have immigrated to the United States have not come to a land that offered them less, but more. It is false to declare or imply the contrary.

What if the thought arises that too many Rudkuses came? Of course, if fewer had come, wages would have risen faster. That is undoubtedly true; but it is also true that *fewer* wage earners would have benefited. *The most widely diffused benefit has come to the most by the policy which was followed by the free market.*

Here is the basic principle: the laboring man who is wise — and who follows scriptural principles — will not demand that more of the benefits from technological advances in *his* industry go to him than is necessary to raise wages in that industry enough above the average for society so that the needed additional workers have an inducement to quit their present lower-paid employment and transfer to this higher-paying industry.

The Beneficiaries Of Capitalism

Another argument hostile to a free market must be considered. It is the most persistent, never-to-be-downed argument. It is the argument based on covetousness, namely, the rich (we assume they got their riches by noncoercion) are still too rich; they live in idleness and in excessive luxury.

That may be and is true to some extent, but not entirely. The man who builds a fortune is almost always a terribly hard worker. His wife at home may sometimes be one who lives in ease and demands luxuries. The future generations may not work hard, although some second, third and fourth generations do not fail to equal their forebear.

But no man will work currently for nothing. If there is no carrot before him the rabbit will not run in the race. Similarly, if

there is no reward, men will not work. The idea that men who build big businesses and are already rich will continue to work if there is no reward for their continued effort is unrealistic; they will not. Society will lose their services.

Nor do the rich spend as much as people think. Can a rich man eat six meals a day; or sit in two chairs at once; or does he carry five watches; or does he wear two pairs of shoes at the same time? But whatever one may think of what the rich do spend, they will not work if they get no current reward for it; nor will anybody else work hard to become rich, because he sees that there is no eventual benefit from it. If there is no continuous reward, everybody will become slack in his efforts. Society will — it can be declared with absolute certainty — become pathetically poor.

Wherein All Men Are Alike

Behind all free effort is a want, a need, a wish which needs to be satisfied. The benefit may not be for self; but the motivation is each man's own motivation; it is not his neighbor's motivation; it is not a bureaucrat's coercion; it is not the demands of a group of people; for men to put their "whole might" into work it must be for their own motivation, not another's.

Legitimate selfishness (pursuit of own values) is the mainspring for a good society.

Every man is entitled to the pursuit of his own individual values. Not only is he entitled to it, everybody else benefits from it. In a *free market* the benefits are diffused. In a coercive market the benefits are not diffused.

The Evaporation Of Rewards

Solomon said, ". . . *riches* certainly make themselves wings" (Proverbs 23:5b). He knew what he was talking about.

Is prosperity permanent? Never. Did the meat packing business remain spectacularly prosperous? It did not. It has become progressively less prosperous through the twentieth century. Today meat packing is one of the least prosperous industries in the country. It was inevitable. In a free economy capital (investments)

move invariably into a prosperous industry until the return in that industry is only average. If too much new investment moves in, the return on capital in that industry will become less than average. High profits last only as long as great new services continue and much new capital is still needed. When the great services end, the additional new capital is no longer needed. Profits then drop to 3 or 4% on the investment. You can almost as well buy some "perfectly safe" bonds. The yield will be about the same.

The Basic Socialist Argument

Finally, we have only the socialist's argument to deal with. He will say to us: Granted that profits have a tendency to return to normal, *there should still be no profit at all; all profit is exploitation.*

The answer to that problem is an altogether different one from the foregoing. We presently lack the space. Furthermore, we are hopefully waiting for some Calvinist intellectual to give us the rational answer to that allegation of the socialists. (We continue in our disappointment that Calvinist savants have not seemingly been able to answer the basic socialist argument developed by Rodbertus, Marx, Lassalle and other socialists. It will be strange if in the 100 years since Marx the Calvinists do not yet know how to answer the socialists *rationally and logically.*) fn

"The Yankee Of The Yards"

If a man reads Sinclair's *The Jungle,* he ought also to read *The Yankee of the Yards,* a biography of Gustavus Franklin Swift, written by his oldest son, Louis F. Swift, in collaboration with Arthur Van Vlissingen, Jr. (A. W. Shaw Company, Chicago, 1927). This gives the history of the meat packing industry from the viewpoint of the son of the founder of the largest meat packing company in the world. This is a story of hard work, thrift, sobriety, sound judgment, courage, resourcefulness.

If readers will read this book, they will discover that what Sinclair calls *Greed* with a capital *G,* is described in *The Yankee of the Yards* as *economy* and as *hatred of waste.* The impression

people get of some action is greatly influenced by the words used to describe it. This man Swift acted a certain way from motives of economy and unhappiness about waste, according to his son. But Sinclair, in his book, says that the sole reason why Swift and his fellow packers operated as they did was from motives of greed.

We have never worked for Swift & Company but we were once a "godchild" to an early career man in Swift & Company. He told us many anecdotes from his personal knowledge and memory.

The Swift family was a large one. Perishable meat, of course, had to be shipped practically every day of the week, including Sunday, if there was to be meat regularly available on the Eastern seaboard. Our informant told us that on Sunday afternoon *all* the qualified members of the Swift family went over to the packinghouse to make out invoices and other papers in connection with shipments to go out on Sunday night trains.

At another time old Gustavus Swift was going down the aisle to his office. He passed the desk of my "godfather" and accidentally kicked over the wastepaper basket. Out of it rolled some scrap paper and a short stub of pencil. Old man Swift grabbed the pencil and held it up and roared like a bull: "Who is wasting my pencils" — obviously referring to this executive who was probably the highest-placed executive in the business outside of members of the family.

I indicated my surprise at the unreasonableness of Gustavus Swift, a big packer, complaining about a pencil stub, and creating a fuss with the intent of humilating one of his executives. I expressed myself critically, and naturally expected my godfather, the victim of this exhibitionism of old Gustavus Swift, to agree with me. But he did not.

"On no," he said; "old Gustavus was entirely right about that. Every *little* saving made a big difference. The company had 30,000 employes. If everyone wasted part of a pencil, it would amount to a lot of money. Small savings *multiplied by a lot of instances* run into big sums. Old Gustavus thoroughly understood that principle. Thirty thousand employes each wasting two cents worth of a five cent pencil would be wasting $600."

It was on thinking of that kind — about *economies* — and not so much personal greed that the great packing companies were developed.

The last survivor of the early packers is Thomas E. Wilson. He was originally, we believe, a "car chaser" in the yards for Morris & Company. The job was to round up "lost" Morris refrigerator cars from the miles and miles of railroad tracks and bring them into use. While doing that modest and uninteresting job Wilson noticed a lot of scrap or junk laying around. He suggested that it be collected and sold. It was done and some $3,000 was realized. *That* attention to economy brought Wilson, a humble employe, to the attention of the Morrisses, the owners of the business, and they began promoting him rapidly, eventually to vice-president. Later, bankers chose Wilson to be the head of a company in difficulties. Wilson changed the name of the company to *Wilson & Company.*

It is slander to describe the men who made the packing industry great and famous as cruel scoundrels motivated solely by personal greed.

If it is argued that each packer should have "looked out" for each of his 30,000 or so employes, how could he? It is beyond any man's abilities or prerogatives. Some of those 30,000 became prosperous; others were just so-so economically; others, by circumstance or through some folly of their own, sank into misery. No individual man can look after 30,000 people or families. It is conscienceless arrogance to pretend it. If a man had one hundred brothers, sisters, cousins and second-cousins, would he "look after" all of the hundred? We have yet to find the man who did or intends to do it. How then could an employer be expected to "look after" 30,000?

A large community necessarily becomes impersonal and the members of it become anonymous to each other. We are reminded that one of the criticisms of the Puritan attitude toward the Industrial Revolution was that the Puritans accepted an impersonal ethics — they relied on the *impersonal* free market, rather than on sentimental or blood ties.

Many of the people who object to a *free market* society really wish society to return to a primitive, tribal structure. They cry for

what is not to be recovered again — a past not half so good as the present. They are sentimentalists rather than rationalists. They want a personally fraternal and a paternalistic market society. fn

Proposed Contents Of Future Issues

As a crossbreed ethico-economic publication, PROGRESSIVE CALVINISM covers now ethics, now economics; individual issues will vary a great deal.

One of the economic subjects which we propose to cover in some detail soon is: What is capital? or what is the nature of capital?

Another subject is the question: *Why* are some societies not prosperous? What makes for a high standard of living?

Related to the subject just mentioned is the question why our grandparents and great-grandparents were generally less prosperous than we are? Are we more prosperous because we live under better laws? Are people generally more prosperous because the rich now get less? Do they, in fact, get less, or do they get an even bigger proportion than they formerly got? Do we have more prosperity because the gold standard for money has been abandoned? Do we have more prosperity because we have labor unions? Russia undoubtedly has more natural resources than has the United States; is prosperity the result of the possession of great natural resources? What has made and makes the United States uniquely prosperous? Why is the United States more prosperous than the Netherlands?

What has birth rate to do with prosperity? Are there too many people in the world? Is there an "iron law of wages" grinding down the poor? What about the questions related to the restriction of the birth rate, birth control, etc.?

Further, we plan to write piecemeal (and probably ineffectively and clumsily) the planks which belong in an economico-political platform reconcilable and consistent with the primitive religious ideas we hold which are practically identical with historic Calvinism — the Calvinism of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. fn

A Reader Writes About Selfishness

A reader writes to us:

> I regret that in your last issue of PROGRESSIVE CALVINISM you have used the word "selfishness." So far as I know selfishness has only a bad meaning. There are other aspects of self concern that do not have a bad meaning such as: self-restraint, self-respect, self-concern. But selfishness has distinctly a bad meaning — and so far as I know, only a bad meaning.

Our correspondent is sufficiently right so that we can hardly disagree with him. But a writer may also believe that there is some merit in what he was trying to say, although he may have the uneasy feeling that he has not presented his ideas at all adequately. That is our thought in regard to our use of the term *selfishness.*

To help clarify our ideas on *selfishness* we add the following, as a supplementary explanation.

Selfishness can mean:

1. Sin — either (a) violation of the Second Table of the Law; or (b) unwillingness to show charity as required by Scripture.

2. Bad manners — pursuing one's own wishes to a degree and in a manner which makes one unpopular with others.

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3. The claim to liberty — the claim to the right to pursue one's own values: (a) for self-regarding interests, or (b) for non-self-regarding interests, but in any event one's own peculiar, individual values.

We are not defending *selfishness* when it means sin or bad manners.

We defend selfishness against the statement or implication of many people that each man's actions should be governed by the wishes, demands or commands of other men or groups of men, as if a man were unselfish only when he puts the wishes of others ahead of his own. On the basis of this false definition of selfishness, a man is unselfish only when he abandons his own liberty, his own personal values.

Are there really any people in the world who define liberty (as distinguished from sin and bad manners) as selfishness? The world and the churches are full of them. They are the people who deny the right to sovereign freedom of individual choice, the people who condemn the right to discriminate. They say: to discriminate is sin; because to discriminate is to act on your own values; to act on your own values is to be selfish; you are not entitled to that liberty.

We are for liberty, which means nothing to us without our having sovereign freedom of choice. And freedom of choice must be based on *one's own values,* not on the values superimposed by others, individually or collectively. fn

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